

thiswayup

OPTIMIZING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH PLAYBOOK

Section 2

Connection With Others:
Staying Connected With Friends
and Family

CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Staying Connected With Friends and Family



Family Connections | Mia Thomas | TEDxYouth@StMarysCollege



Opening Video:

[TED Talk: Family Connections by Mia Thomas](#)

5 minutes

In her engaging presentation, Mia Thomas delves into the social and emotional bonds we share with various individuals in our lives. She discusses the evolving concept of family, emphasizing that family isn't solely defined by blood relations but also by the meaningful connections we cultivate. Mia highlights how these relationships contribute to our emotional well-being and personal growth, encouraging viewers to value and nurture their connections with both family and friends.

This talk is particularly relevant for high school students, as it underscores the significance of building and maintaining supportive relationships, which are crucial during the formative teenage years.

Fast Facts

01

Social Connections Enhance Mental and Physical Health

Being connected to others helps protect against serious illnesses and diseases. High-quality relationships can reduce the risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression, and anxiety.

(Selkoe, D. J., & Hardy, J. (2016). The amyloid hypothesis of Alzheimer's disease at 25 years. *EMBO molecular medicine*, 8(6), 595–608. <https://doi.org/10.15252/emmm.201606210>).

02

Supportive Relationships Improve Stress Management and Sleep Quality

Social connections can improve our ability to manage stress, anxiety, and depression. They also contribute to healthier eating habits, increased physical activity, and better sleep quality.

(Holt-Lunstad, J. (2024). Social connection as a critical factor for mental and physical health: Evidence, trends, challenges, and future implications. *World Psychiatry*, 23(3), 312–332.)

03

Strong Social Bonds Contribute to Longevity

People with strong social bonds tend to live longer, healthier lives. A 2019 study by researchers at the American Cancer Society, involving more than 580,000 adults found that social isolation significantly increased the risk of early death—by more than 50% in some groups.

Those who lacked supportive relationships were also more likely to experience depression, insomnia, and cognitive decline. The findings suggest that human connection is a powerful factor in overall health and longevity, potentially more protective than avoiding risks like obesity or smoking.

(Alcaraz, K. I., Eddens, K. S., Blase, J. L., Diver, W. R., Patel, A. V., Teras, L. R., Stevens, V. L., Jacobs, E. J., & Gapstur, S. M. (2019). Social isolation and mortality in U.S. Black and White men and women. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 188(1), 102–109. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwy231>).

WHY STAYING CONNECTED MATTERS



Mental Health Boost:

- Staying connected with friends and family helps lower stress, anxiety, and depression by making you feel supported and understood.

Physical Health Perks:

- People with strong social ties tend to have healthier hearts, better sleep, and even stronger immune systems.

Everyday Confidence:

- Being socially connected builds your confidence, helps you solve problems better, and makes tough times feel less overwhelming.

Deep Dive

Reduces Risk of Depression

People who feel socially connected are less likely to experience chronic loneliness, which is a major risk factor for depression. A 2020 study published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* (Orben, Tomoven, Blakemore) found that adolescents with stronger social ties had a significantly lower risk of developing depressive symptoms over time.

Protects Against Stress

Social support helps regulate your body's stress response. When you're connected to others, your brain releases oxytocin, the "bonding" hormone that helps calm the stress system and lowers cortisol (the "stress" hormone). This makes you feel more at ease, even during tough times.

Improves Brain Function

Physical activity lowers stress hormones like cortisol, helping you feel calmer and more in control. It also gives your mind a break from overthinking and worrying. Interacting with others activates regions of the brain tied to emotion regulation, memory, and learning. Studies have shown that socially active teens are more likely than those who are not active to have better academic performance and emotional resilience.

Deep Dive

Loneliness Can Be Toxic

Chronic loneliness affects the brain and body much like chronic stress. It's been linked to increased inflammation, which is associated with anxiety, depression, and even long-term health conditions like heart disease.

Connected Teens Cope Better

Teens with strong relationships—especially with family or trusted adults—are more likely to talk through problems, ask for help, and bounce back from challenges. That's resilience in action.



KEY TIPS

01 | Make Time for Check-Ins

Why it matters: Regular connection builds trust and shows others you care, even if it's just for a few minutes.

How to do it:

- Send a quick text or meme to someone you care about to say you're thinking of them.
- Schedule a weekly call or FaceTime with someone who matters to you.
- Ask someone you value having in your life, "How's your day?" and really listen.

02 | Do Something Together

Why it matters: Shared experiences build stronger bonds and create lasting memories.

How to do it:

- Invite a friend for a walk, study session, or movie night.
- Cook or do a do-it-yourself (DIY) project with family.
- Play a sport, game, or join a club together.
- Join an interest group to meet others who like the same activities you do.

KEY TIPS

03 | Show Appreciation

Why it matters: Gratitude strengthens relationships and makes people feel seen and valued.

How to do it:

- Say thank you for small things.
- Write a short note or compliment someone genuinely.
- Acknowledge when someone supports you.
 - Ex. "I really appreciate how you took the time to check in after I had a rough day."

04 | Be Present (Not Just Online)

Why it matters: Quality time beats quantity. Being truly present when you are with someone builds a deeper connection.

How to do it:

- Put your phone down during conversations.
- Make eye contact and listen actively.
- Try doing tech-free activities together such as painting or doing a puzzle.

KEY TIPS

05 | Reach Out First

Why it matters: It shows leadership in the relationship and reminds others they matter to you.

How to do it:

- Don't wait for others to text or invite you.
- Say, "Hey, want to hang out?" or "Miss you—what's new?".
- Take the first step even if it feels awkward—it usually pays off.



CLASS ACTIVITY

Connection Circles

Goal: Help students build awareness and appreciation for connection within the classroom.

How it works:

1. Reflect (2 min.):
 - a. Students write about a time someone helped or supported them (friend, family, peer, or teacher).
2. Share (5–10 min.):
 - a. Form a circle (or small groups). One student shares, then tosses a soft ball to the next person to share.
3. Connection Challenge (Optional):
 - a. Everyone writes one person they'll reach out to today and why.

Why it matters: This builds trust, empathy, and reminds students that connections are already around them.

Inclusive Options for Sharing:

1. Offer Flexible Prompts:

Instead of “Share a positive way someone helped you...,” use: “Share a moment when someone made you smile, supported you, or something kind you saw—even if it wasn’t directed at you.” This allows students to reflect on any positive interaction they’ve witnessed or experienced—no matter how small.

2. Add a “Pass” Option:

Always give students the ability to opt out without pressure: “You can share something, say ‘pass,’ or just say one thing you’re grateful for today.”

CLASS ACTIVITY



3. Let Them Reflect on Themselves:

If connection with others is hard, offer this alternative: “Think of a time you helped someone else or showed kindness.” “What does kindness mean to you?”

4. Use Writing First:

Allow students to write their response before speaking—this helps those who need more time or are more introverted.

These strategies help create **psychological safety**, which makes it more likely students will engage and build trust over time.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

The 3-Connection Challenge

Goal: Encourage intentional outreach to strengthen existing relationships.

Instructions:

- **Step 1:** Choose 3 people (a friend, a family member, and someone you haven't talked to in a while).
- **Step 2:** Reach out to each with a message, compliment, or invitation to catch up.
- **Step 3:** Reflect: How did it feel to reach out? How did they respond? Did it boost your mood?

Why it matters: Taking the first step helps build confidence in social interactions and boosts emotional well-being.

Not every student has close friends or a supportive family, and we want the individual activity to be meaningful for everyone, not isolating. Here's how to adapt it with empathy and inclusivity:

Connection in Any Form

Title: *Find or Create a Moment of Connection*

Instructions (Student-facing):

Connection doesn't always have to come from family or close friends. This week, your goal is to notice or create a small moment of connection with someone or something. Choose one of the options below—or create your own.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY



Pick ONE:

- **Reach out to someone at school**—this could be a classmate, a teacher, or someone you sit near. Ask how their day is going.
- **Send a message or comment**—on a positive post online or in a group chat.
- **Do something kind anonymously**—hold a door open, leave a nice note, compliment someone.
- **Join a group activity or club**—even just one time.
- **Write a note or letter**—to someone you admire, even if you don't send it.
- **Spend time with a pet, nature, or a hobby you enjoy**—connection to something calming counts too.

Reflection Prompt:

- What did you do or notice?
- How did it feel to connect—even in a small way?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Which one or two actions would you want to try again? Why?

This framing gives agency and flexibility, allowing students to explore connection in ways that are authentic and accessible to their lives—whether or not they have a strong personal support system.

SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Connection Inventory

Goal: Support teachers in staying personally connected for their own emotional well-being.

Instructions:

- Take 10 quiet minutes and list **5 people** (colleagues, friends, family, mentors) who energize or support you.
- Circle anyone you haven't connected with in the last 2 weeks.
- Choose 1–2 people to text, email, or schedule a coffee/walk with this week.
- Optional: Set a weekly 10-minute “connection reset” on your calendar to repeat the exercise.

Why it matters: Teachers who feel socially connected experience less burnout and higher job satisfaction. Modeling connection also inspires students.



COMMON MYTHS & TRUTHS

Myth

"I have to be super social to be connected."

Truth

Quality matters more than quantity. Even one meaningful relationship—a friend, mentor, or trusted adult—can provide huge mental health benefits. You don't need a big circle; you need safe, supportive connections.

Cool Fact: Social connection is as important as sleep and nutrition.

Myth

Online friends aren't "real" friends.

Truth

Digital connections can be meaningful—especially if they include shared interests, emotional support, or real conversations. Balance is key, but online relationships can still offer a sense of belonging.

Cool Fact: Connection helps your brain grow.

According to research, strong social bonds are a better predictor of long life than exercise or avoiding smoking.

Advice: You don't have to be perfect—just present. Showing up, listening, and being kind makes a huge difference. You don't need to fix people's problems or have deep talks all the time—consistency and care build strong bonds.

KEY ADVICE

Positive relationships activate oxytocin, the “bonding hormone,” which reduces stress and helps your brain feel safe—making it easier to focus, learn, and grow.

(Olf, M., Frijling, J. L., Kubzansky, L. D., Bradley, B., Ellenbogen, M. A., Cardoso, C., Bartz, J. A., Yee, J., & van Zuiden, M. (2013). The role of oxytocin in social bonding, stress regulation and mental health: An update on the moderating effects of context and interindividual differences. *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, 38(9), 1883–1894).

Connection is a Superpower

Staying connected with friends, family, and people who care about you isn't just nice—it's essential for your mental, physical, and emotional health. Strong relationships help you feel seen, safe, and supported, especially during tough times. Whether it's sharing a laugh, talking through something hard, or just showing up for each other, connection builds resilience and reminds you that you're not alone. You don't need a huge circle—just a few meaningful connections can make a big impact. Keep showing up, reaching out, and being real. That's where the strength is.



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Optimizing Your Mental Health Playbook

Section 2

Connection with Others:
Find Caring Adults and Mentors

CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Find Caring Adults and Mentors

 The Power of Mentoring | Reggie Nelson | TEDxUniversityofEssex



Opening Video:

[Reggie Nelson: The Power of Mentoring \(TED Talk\)](#)

15 minutes

In this powerful talk, Reggie Nelson shares his own story of transformation and gives thanks to a mentor who offered him visibility, guidance, and hope. His experience illustrates how having even one supportive adult can change a young person's path—making it highly relatable and impactful for students.

01

Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Support During Stressful Times:

A mentor—someone who offers guidance, support, and encouragement to help another person grow personally—serves as a vital support figure for youth experiencing stress, depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges. Their presence can provide stability and direction during overwhelming periods.

Reduction in Depression Among At-Risk Youth:

A study with teens from low-income families found that having a mentor helped protect them from the negative effects of parental neglect. In fact, mentorship reduced their risk of developing depression, showing that supportive relationships outside the family can play an important role in young people's mental health.

(Lee, J., Allen, J., Lim, H., Choi, G., & Jung, J. (2021). The role of a mentorship program on the relationship between neglect and depression among adolescents in low-income families. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(13), 7010. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18137010>)

02

Academic and Social Development

Improved Academic Outcomes:

Youth engaged in mentoring relationships are less likely to initiate drug and alcohol use, less likely to engage in violent behavior, and tend to have better peer and family relationships, all of which contribute to improved academic performance.

Enhanced Self-Esteem and Confidence:

Mentoring programs have been associated with increased self-esteem and confidence among adolescents, which are critical factors for academic and personal success.

(Claro, A., & Perelmiter, T. (2022). The effects of mentoring programs on emotional well-being in youth: A meta-analysis. *Contemporary School Psychology*, 26(4), 545–557. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-021-00377-2>)

03

Long-Term Impact and Societal Benefits

Youth mentoring builds trust, resilience, and hope, helping students navigate challenges and envision positive futures.

Parents report that when youth participate in mentorship programs, family functioning improves significantly, with better communication and problem-solving within the household.

(Darling, N., Hamilton, S. F., & Shaver, K. H. (2003). Relationships outside the family: Unrelated adults. In G. R. Adams & M. D. Berzonsky (Eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence* (pp. 349–370). Blackwell.)

Why is it important to find caring adults?

Finding caring adults in your life matters *a lot*— and here's why:

- **They've Got Your Back:** A trusted adult can listen, offer advice, or just be there when things feel heavy. You don't have to face everything alone.
- **They Help You Level Up:** Whether it's school, friendships, or life goals, caring adults can guide you, challenge you, and cheer you on—like a personal coach for your future.
- **They Keep You Grounded:** When emotions or stress feel overwhelming, a steady adult can help you think clearly and remind you of your strengths.

You don't need a perfect adult—just someone who truly cares. This kind of support can seriously boost your confidence, choices, and even your mental health.

Deep Dive

Let's take a deeper dive into why adult-youth connections are so powerful and essential for our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being.

The Power of Caring Adult Connections

Caring adults—like teachers, coaches, family members, counselors, or community leaders—are protective factors in your life. That means their presence can lower the risk of mental health struggles, improve academic and life outcomes, and help you bounce back from challenges.

Brain Science: Safety + Support = Growth

- The adolescent brain is still developing—especially the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation.
- When you have consistent, warm, and supportive adults in your life, they feel emotionally safe, which reduces stress and activates areas of the brain tied to learning and problem-solving.
- This emotional safety also helps regulate cortisol (the stress hormone) and improves resilience to anxiety, depression, and burnout.

KEY RESEARCH INSIGHTS

01

The Search Institute (2018) found that youth who have at least one developmental relationship with a caring adult are:

- **2x more likely** to engage in school.
- **55% more likely** to report being hopeful about their future.
- **45% more likely** to show strong social-emotional skills.

02

A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study (2022) showed that:

- High schoolers who felt connected to adults at school had lower rates of depression and suicidal thoughts, even during the pandemic.
- Connection = protection.

03

Mentoring.org reports that youth with mentors are:

- **78% more likely** to volunteer and give back to their communities.
- **55% more likely** to enroll in college.
- More likely to have better self-esteem and avoid risky behaviors.

EMOTIONAL & SOCIAL BENEFITS

- Trust and guidance from adults help teens feel less alone and more capable.
- Teens who feel supported by adults are more likely to develop healthy coping strategies.
- Positive adult connections can help teens navigate peer pressure, identity, family dynamics, and life stress more confidently.

One trusted adult can change everything. It doesn't have to be a parent—it could be a coach, teacher, neighbor, or even a mentor online. These connections create a foundation of safety and strength that helps you grow into your best self.



KEY TIPS

01 | Look Around You

Why It Matters: Caring adults might already be part of your daily life—like teachers, coaches, school staff, or neighbors.

How to Do It:

- Notice who takes the time to check in on you.
- Think about who listens when you talk or supports your goals.
- Trust your gut—mentors make you feel safe and seen.

02 | Start Small Conversations

Why It Matters: Building a connection takes time, and every relationship starts with a simple conversation.

How To Do It:

- Ask a teacher about their career or how they got into their job.
- Share something you're working on and ask for advice.
- Be open—most adults are happy to support students who show interest.
- Express gratitude and let someone know they have helped make a difference in your life.

KEY TIPS

03 | Ask for Support or Guidance

Why It Matters: Mentors don't have to solve all your problems, but they can guide you through tough decisions or listen when you need to vent.

How to Do It:

- Say something like, "Can I ask you something I've been thinking about?"
- Let them know you respect their opinion—it helps strengthen the bond.



KEY TIPS

04 | Speak Up About What You Need

Why It Matters: Adults won't always know how to help unless you tell them. Communication builds trust.

How to Do It:

- Share what kind of support you're looking for (like help with school, emotions, future plans).
- Be honest—mentors are there to encourage, not judge.

05 | Stay in Touch

Why It Matters: Mentorship is a relationship—it grows over time.

How to Do It:

- Check in once in a while, even if just to say thanks.
- Let them know how you're doing or what you've learned.
- Relationships work best when you put in effort, too.

CLASS ACTIVITY

The Web of Support

Objective: Help students reflect on the positive adult influences in their lives and recognize where they might seek support.

Instructions:

- Give each student a worksheet with a large circle in the center labeled “Me.”
- Around the circle, have branches labeled: School, Family, Community, Online, Other.
- Students write down the names or roles of adults who have helped or supported them in each category.
- In small groups (optional), students share general reflections (not names), like:
 - “I realized I have a coach who really supports me.”
 - “I don’t have someone in one area—how can I find that?”

Discussion Prompt:

- What makes someone a good mentor?
- How can you build stronger connections with someone who could become a mentor?

Adaptation Tip: If a student doesn’t feel they have a caring adult, frame this as a goal-setting activity—“Who could become one?”



INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Build Your Mentor Map

Objective: Encourage students to take ownership of finding and forming healthy mentor relationships.

Instructions:

- Have students brainstorm:
 - One adult they trust now (if any).
 - One adult they'd like to build a stronger connection with.
 - One place where they could meet a supportive adult (club, job, program, etc.).
- Write a "starter sentence" to approach one of these adults (e.g., "I admire how you always listen. Could I talk with you sometime about my goals?").
- Optional journaling prompt:
 - "What qualities do I want in a mentor, and why?"



TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Be the Anchor

Objective: Support teachers in reflecting on their role as mentors and recognizing their own needs while being present for students.

Instructions:

- Take 10 quiet minutes and journal using the prompts below:
 - “A student I’ve recently supported is...”
 - “One way I’ve shown up as a caring adult this week...”
 - “What helps me stay grounded and available to my students?”
- End with a self-care commitment:
 - “This week, I will take 15 minutes to [walk outside, call a friend, meditate, etc.] because I can’t pour from an empty cup.”

Optional Staffroom Poster:

“Being a mentor starts with being well. Take care of you so you can care for them.”



KEY ADVICE

Finding Caring Adults

01 | **Look for people who listen without judging.**

Caring adults are often the ones who really hear you and support your growth, not just give advice.

02 | **Start with people you already know.**

Teachers, coaches, counselors, neighbors, or family friends can be great mentors—you might just need to take the first step.

03 | **Trust your gut.**

If someone makes you feel safe, seen, and respected, that's a good sign they could be a supportive adult in your life.

KEY ADVICE

Finding Mentors

01 | **It's okay to ask for help.**

Mentors don't have to be formal—start small by asking someone you admire for advice or sharing your goals with them.

02 | **Mentors come in many forms.**

A mentor can be older, the same age, or just more experienced in an area you care about (like art, sports, or school).

03 | **Stay open and curious.**

Join clubs, volunteer, or take part in school activities where supportive adults are involved—you might meet someone who inspires you.

MENTORS



Having caring adults and mentors in your life isn't just helpful—it's powerful. These relationships give you guidance, encouragement, and a sense of belonging as you grow. Whether it's a teacher who listens, a coach who motivates you, or a neighbor who believes in your potential, mentors can help you discover your strengths and feel more confident facing challenges. And remember, you don't have to go it alone—reaching out, asking for support, and building trust with caring adults is a strong step toward shaping the future you want. The support is out there—and you deserve it.

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Optimizing Your Mental Health Playbook

Section 2

Connection with Others:
Engaging in Shared Activities

CONNECTION WITH OTHERS

Engaging in Shared Activities



The Power of Social Collaboration to Change a Community | Kevin Dawson | TEDxMidland



Opening Video:

[The Power of Social Collaboration to Change a Community" by Kevin Dawson](#)

14 minutes

Kevin Dawson's talk is engaging, accessible, and focuses on real-life examples of how working together on shared activities can create meaningful change. It connects well with teen values—like purpose, teamwork, and belonging—and encourages them to get involved in something bigger than themselves. This talk is especially relatable for students who are exploring how to make an impact or build stronger peer connections through clubs, sports, volunteer work, or school initiatives. Dawson explores how collective efforts and collaborative initiatives can transform communities, emphasizing the role of shared activities in fostering unity and driving positive change.

Fast Facts

01

Shared Activities Boost Belonging

Doing things together—like playing sports, joining clubs, or working on projects—increases feelings of belonging, which is a key protective factor against loneliness and depression

(O'Donnell, A. W., Redmond, G., Gardner, A. A., Wang, J. J. J., & Mooney, A. (2024). Extracurricular activity participation, school belonging, and depressed mood: A test of the compensation hypothesis during adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science*, 28(4), 596–611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2023.2260745>).

02

Teamwork Builds Emotional Intelligence

Participating in group activities helps teens develop empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution—skills that are essential for strong relationships and future success.

(Amiel, N. Y. (2023). The role of team sports in fostering inclusivity and empathy among diverse student groups. *Cross-Cultural Management Journal*, 25(2), 87–92. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8280767>)

03

Helping Others Helps You

Volunteering or engaging in group service activities boosts happiness, reduces stress, and increases self-esteem—especially in teens.

(Lanza, K., Hunt, E., Mantey, D. S., et al (2023). Volunteering, health, and well-being of children and adolescents in the United States. *JAMA Network Open*, 6(5), e2313521. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.13521>)

04

Teens in Shared Activities Feel Less Isolated

Teens involved in extracurriculars or group events report lower rates of anxiety and social isolation than those who are not involved in these activities.

(Knifsend, C. A., & Juvonen, J. (2022). Type and breadth of high school extracurricular activity involvement and postsecondary psychosocial well-being among diverse youth. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 52(2), 319–330. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01695-1>)

05

Community Connection = Stronger Resilience

Being part of something bigger—like a team, club, or community project—helps teens bounce back from stress faster and feel supported when things get tough.

(O'Donnell, A. W., Redmond, G., Gardner, A. A., Wang, J. J. J., & Mooney, A. (2024). Extracurricular activity participation, school belonging, and depressed mood: A test of the compensation hypothesis during adolescence. *Applied Developmental Science*, 28(4), 596–611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2023.2260745>)

WHY DOES IT MATTER?



Engaging in shared activities is important because it strengthens your sense of belonging, builds social skills, and supports mental and emotional well-being.

Here's why it matters:

Mental Health

Doing things with others—like clubs, sports, or creative projects—reduces feelings of loneliness and isolation. Shared experiences create connection, which can protect against anxiety and depression.

Emotional Strength

Participating in group activities helps you learn empathy, communication, and teamwork. These emotional intelligence skills are key for handling challenges and building healthy relationships.

Physical & Social Health

Active group participation (like playing a team sport or volunteering) not only boosts physical health but also helps you feel more supported and less stressed—because you're not doing life alone.

Deep Dive

Let's take a deep dive into how to engage in shared activities, especially for high school students looking to build stronger social connections and improve their mental well-being.

What Are Shared Activities?

Shared activities are things you do with other people—like group sports, art clubs, study groups, volunteer work, music, drama, or even gaming. The key is that you're doing something with others, not just around them.

Why They Work

- Shared goals create teamwork and trust.
- Face-to-face interaction boosts mood and reduces stress.
- Positive feedback from peers reinforces self-worth and belonging.
- Co-regulation (emotional syncing) happens when we connect with others emotionally, which supports emotional resilience.

Deep Dive

Science Says

- Social engagement activates brain regions tied to reward (like the ventral striatum), making it more likely you'll feel happy and motivated.
- According to *The Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, teens who participate in structured group activities report higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression.
- Collaborative environments also improve brain function—like planning, memory, and focus.



How to Start Engaging in Shared Activities

Start Small

- Join one school club or sports team that sparks your interest.
- Attend a community event or help with a school project.
- Ask a friend to do something with you—like a creative challenge or walking after school.

Show Up Consistently

- It takes time to feel like you “fit in.” Keep attending even if it feels awkward at first. Familiarity builds connection.

Be Open and Curious

- Ask people about their interests, offer help, or share something about yourself.
- You don’t need to be best friends with everyone—look for people who have shared values or goals.

Try New Things

- Don’t wait for the perfect moment. Trying a new activity might surprise you.
- Say yes to safe opportunities that push you a little out of your comfort zone.

Reflect on the Experience

- After each group activity, ask: “Did I feel more connected?” or “What did I enjoy about that?”
- This helps you figure out what works for you socially and emotionally.

KEY TIPS

01 | Find Your People

Why It Matters: Being part of a group with shared interests helps you feel like you belong and creates natural opportunities to connect.

How to Do It:

- Explore clubs, sports teams, or after-school activities that excite you—whether it's a book club, drama, sports, or volunteer work. The key is consistency and showing up.

02 | Step Outside Your Comfort Zone

Why It Matters: Trying new activities can push your boundaries, help you meet new people, and build confidence.

How to Do It:

- Join a group activity you've never tried before—whether it's a fitness class, a creative workshop, or an outreach program. You don't need to be an expert, just open to the experience.

KEY TIPS

03 | Find Your Tribe

Why It Matters: Engaging in shared activities is about more than just participating—it's about connecting with others, supporting teammates, and building trust.

How to Do It:

- Listen to others, offer help, and show appreciation for people's contributions. Being a positive presence can strengthen relationships and make activities more enjoyable for everyone.

04 | Focus on the Experience, Not Just the Outcome

Why It Matters: The process of working with others is as valuable as the results. Enjoying the experience can reduce pressure and increase connection.

How to Do It:

- Take the time to appreciate the moments of creativity, collaboration, and fun in any group activity. Even if it's just hanging out or working on a school project, enjoy being part of the team.

KEY TIPS

03 | Make Time for Social Interaction

Why It Matters: Regularly engaging in shared activities helps prevent feelings of isolation and strengthens your emotional resilience.

How to Do It:

- Schedule regular hangouts with friends or participate in social events. It can be something simple, like grabbing coffee or going for a walk with someone.



INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Reach-Out Challenge

Goal: To encourage students to actively engage in a shared activity outside the classroom, promoting social connection and community.

Objective: Students will take a proactive step in engaging with others and building stronger connections.

Activity Steps:

- 1. Choose an activity** to do with a friend, family member, or someone you've been meaning to connect with (could be a phone call, virtual hangout, sports activity, cooking together, etc.)
- 2. Set a date and time** for the activity—make sure it's a commitment!
- 3. Participate in the activity** and reflect on the experience afterward:
 - Did it feel good to connect with others?
 - How did the shared activity bring you closer to that person or group?
 - How can you continue to build these types of connections moving forward?

Reflection:

Students write a brief journal entry or share in a class discussion about how engaging in shared activities strengthened their relationship and how it impacted their mood and well-being.

CLASS ACTIVITY

Collaborative Problem-Solving Challenge

Goal: To promote teamwork, communication, and collaboration in a shared activity.

Objective: Students will work together in teams to solve a challenging problem, helping them understand the value of shared activities and teamwork.

Activity Steps:

- 1. Divide the class into small groups** (4–5 students per group).
- 2. Present a fun problem-solving challenge** (e.g., building a structure with limited materials, solving a riddle together, or coming up with a creative solution to a scenario).
- 3. Set a time limit** (e.g., 15 minutes) to complete the challenge.
- 4. Debrief:** After the activity, ask students to reflect:
 - How did working together help you solve the problem?
 - What role did each team member play?
 - How did you feel being part of a team?

Discussion:

Emphasize the value of collaboration, how different ideas and strengths come together in shared activities, and how communication plays a key role in success.

TEACHER SELF-CARE ACTIVITY

Group Engagement

Goal: To encourage teachers to stay socially connected with colleagues, preventing burnout and building a support system.

Objective: Teachers will participate in a group activity to foster camaraderie, reduce stress, and promote work-life balance.

Activity Steps:

- 1. Organize a team-building activity** during a break or after school (it could be a group lunch, a walking break, or a short game, like trivia or Pictionary).
- 2. Encourage positive interactions** by sharing something personal, reflecting on positive classroom experiences, or working together on a creative project.
- 3. Make it a regular practice** to engage in shared activities with colleagues, whether weekly or monthly, to maintain meaningful connections.
- 4. Afterward, reflect on how the activity affected your mood and interactions.**
Did it help reduce stress? Did it make you feel more connected to your colleagues?

Self-Care Tip:

Nurturing your own well-being through shared activities is essential to how you support your students. Make time to connect with colleagues and build supportive relationships—both within your school community and beyond it.